

Barack Obama weeps as he unveils gun control measures

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Washington: US President Barack Obama shed tears as he announced a series of new common sense measures meant to reduce gun violence, by passing Congress on the controversial issue.

"Every time I think about those kids, it gets me mad," Obama said as tears streamed down his cheeks in the East Room of the White House in the presence of a large number of victims of mass shootings.

He summoned the memory of the 20 elementary school children killed three years ago in Newtown, Connecticut.

Obama warned that the US gun lobby cannot be allowed to block government action.

"The gun lobby may be holding Congress hostage right now, but they can't hold America hostage," he said.

"All of us should be able to work together to find a balance that declares the rest of our rights are also important. Second Amendment rights are important, but there are other rights that we care about as well. And we have to be able to balance them, because our right to worship freely and safely -- that right was denied to Christians in Charleston, South Carolina," he said.

"That was denied Jews in Kansas City, and that was denied Muslims in Chapel Hill and Sikhs in Oak Creek. They had rights too. Our right to peaceful assembly, that right was robbed from moviegoers in Aurora and Lafayette.

Our inalienable right to life, and liberty and the pursuit of happiness, those rights were stripped from college kids in Blacksburg and Santa Barbara, and from high- schoolers in Columbine, and from first graders in Newtown," he said.

"First graders. And from every family who never imagined that their loved one would be taken from our lives by a bullet from a gun. Every time I think about those kids, it gets me mad. And by the way, it happens on the streets of Chicago every day," said the US president as he paused for a moment to control his emotions.

Obama said the gun lobby is taking "Congress hostage, but they cannot hold America hostage."

"So, all of us need to demand that Congress be brave enough to stand up to the gun lobby's lies. All of us need to stand up and protect its citizens. All of us need to demand governors, and legislators and businesses do their part to make our communities safer," he said.

"We need the wide majority of responsible gun owners, who grieve with us every time this happens and feel like your views are not being properly represented, to join with us to demand something better," he added.

Announcing his executive measures, Obama said anybody in the business of selling firearms must get a license and conduct background checks or be subject to criminal prosecutions.

"We're also taking steps to make the background check system more efficient," he said.

"We're going to do more to help those suffering from mental illness get the help that they need," he said, adding that the government is going to boost gun safety technology.

Noting that the US is not the only country on Earth with violent or dangerous people, Obama said the US is only advanced country on Earth that sees this kind of mass violence erupt with this kind of frequency.

"It doesn't happen in other advanced countries. It's not even close," he said.

"Instead of thinking about how to solve the problem, this has become one of our most polarised, partisan debates," he said.

"I am not on the ballot again, I am not looking to score points. I think we can disagree without impugning other people's motives or without being disagreeable. We don't need to be talking past one another, but we do have to feel a sense of urgency about it," Obama said.

He called for a united front by the people in support of his gun control laws.

"We have to be just as organised in the defence of our kids. This is not that complicated. The reason Congress blocks laws is because they want to win elections. If you make it hard for them to win an election if they block those laws, they'll change course, I promise," he asserted amidst applause.

However, he acknowledged that it is a tough call.

"It will be hard and it won't happen overnight. It won't happen during this Congress; it won't happen during my presidency. But a lot of things don't happen overnight. A woman's right to vote didn't happen overnight, the liberation of African-Americans didn't happen overnight. LGBT rights, that was decades' worth of work. So just because it's hard that's no excuse not to try," he said.

According to a White House fact sheet, over the past decade in America, more than 100,000 people have been killed as a result of gun violence-and millions more have been the victim of assaults, robberies, and other crimes involving a gun.

- *With PTI Inputs*